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PAGE 01 HARARE 03602 030720Z
ACTION INR-00

INFO LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	A-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	USNW-00
DODE-00	DS-00	EUR-00	UTED-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	LAB-01
VCE-00	NSAE-00	TEST-00	USIE-00	IIP-00	DSCC-00	DRL-02
NFAT-00	SAS-00	/003W				

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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0450
INFO NSC WASHDC
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS HARARE 003602

SIPDIS

AF/PD FOR COX, ROBERTSON, AF/S FOR SCHLACHTER, AF/RA
(SWANN), INR/R/MR, NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ZI PREL PHUM
SUBJECT: GOZ APPROVES INFORMATION BILL

11. THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE (GOZ) HAS APPROVED THE CONTROVERSIAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY BILL. THE BILL IS LIKELY TO BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT FOR CONSIDERATION WITHIN THE NEXT 10 DAYS.
12. THE BILL CONTAINS A NUMBER OF MEASURES PROVIDING FOR GOVERNMENT LICENSING AND CONTROL OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS. SEVERAL MEDIA OBSERVERS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING THE MEDIA INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (MISA) AND THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY (NCA), HAVE SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE BILL. THEY DESCRIBE IT AS "ANOTHER GOZ TOOL TO MUZZLE THE INDEPENDENT PRESS."
13. ACCORDING TO AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THE NOVEMBER 30 EDITION OF THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED DAILY "THE HERALD," THE BILL PROVIDES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "MEDIA AND INFORMATION COMMISSION" TO REGULATE THE MEDIA INDUSTRY. THE ARTICLE DOES NOT INDICATE THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION, BUT MAKES CLEAR THAT THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION WILL HAVE CONTROL OF THE COMMISSION.

14. THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE BILL ARE:

- SANCTIONS AGAINST JOURNALISTS OR MEDIA ORGANIZATION THAT ".SPREAD RUMORS, FALSEHOODS OR CAUSE ALARM AND DESPONDENCY UNDER THE GUISE OF AUTHENTIC REPORTS."
- THE REQUIREMENT THAT MEDIA OWNERS REGISTER WITH THE COMMISSION, WHICH MAY CANCEL THE REGISTRATION IF AN ORGANIZATION VIOLATES ANY PART OF THE BILL.
- THE REQUIREMENT THAT ONLY ZIMBABWEAN CITIZENS OR COMPANIES OWNED BY ZIMBABWEANS WILL BE ALLOWED TO OPERATE MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS.
- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGISTER OF JOURNALISTS AND THE ISSUANCE OF CERTIFICATES OF REGISTRATION TO JOURNALISTS WHO "MUST POSSESS THE PRESCRIBED QUALIFICATIONS AND BE A CITIZEN OF AND BASED IN ZIMBABWE."
- GRANTING THE COMMISSION AUTHORITY TO ACCREDIT JOURNALISTS AND GIVING THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AUTHORITY TO PRESCRIBE THE MANNER AND FORM IN WHICH THE ACCREDITATION WILL BE DONE. THE BILL ALSO GIVES THE COMMISSION AUTHORITY TO SUSPEND OR PUNISH JOURNALISTS FOR "MISCONDUCT."
- SANCTIONS AGAINST JOURNALISTS WHO WRITE FOR PUBLICATIONS OTHER THAN THE ONE THAT EMPLOYS THEM.
- THE REQUIREMENT THAT ALL FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS NEED TO BE CITIZENS OF ZIMBABWE.
- THE REQUIREMENT THAT FOREIGN MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS WILL BE SET UP ONLY WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND ONLY JOURNALISTS ACCREDITED IN TERMS OF THE BILL SHALL BE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS.

15. IF THIS BILL IS PASSED AS WRITTEN, IT WILL GIVE THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE SWEEPING POWER TO DETERMINE

WHO MAY OWN AND OPERATE A MEDIA COMPANY, WHO MAY WORK
AS A JOURNALIST AND WHAT NEWS MAY BE REPORTED.

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PAGE 04 HARARE 03602 030720Z

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